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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Well, there's no denying it now - not with that fresh coat of seven inches of snow outside - winter is definitely here in the Northeast. The initial prediction was 3-5 inches, turning to a rain/snow mix. Well, we got the 3-5, plus two, of all sleet. No snow, no rain - just that heavy granular stuff. I went out 3-4 times to clean the driveway and walks because I was concerned that once the rain started, it would freeze everything and make it worse to shovel. So, instead of waiting for the sleet to stop, and then use the snowblower to remove, I shoveled. And shoveled, and shoveled. By the third trip out, I decided to use the snowblower and take some pressure off of my back. We then made a final cleaning in the early evening. Of course, a little more sleet fell afterward, and froze good and solid!! So, I'm hoping that during the warm-up this weekend, what's left of the ice will melt and save my back from having to try and break up what's out there.

Okay, enough about the weather, our first really "significant" snowfall of the year. What I found interesting this week was an article pertaining to a study at Syracuse University about e-mail and the problems that arise with how people read/misread or write/miswrite e-mail.

Now, this issue isn't new to those of us who have been using the internet and/or online services for a long time. I recall numerous instances, both online the services and various bulletin boards, people making a fuss about how messages were written and interpreted. It can be difficult, we all know that.

With any written communication, it's impossible for the reader of the message to truly know the intent of the written word. As the study shows, the written word cannot express emotions, etc. as well as the spoken word. Also, in today's electronic world of communications, there are many other factors involved: time, speed, cost, technology, software are all factors.

And then you have various personalities reading or writing these messages. Some people you know well, while others may be new acquaintances or co-workers. Do people read the message, or between the lines. Are some people predisposed to being defensive? Do some people scan messages without truly reading everything?

This is nothing new, but the technology has changed somewhat, and more people are exposed to this medium than 20 years ago. What's the solution? I have no idea. All I can suggest is that people who are writing the e-mails, text messages, IMs, etc. need to be more careful; and the people

who are recipients need to realize that these messages can be misleading. When all else fails, communicate in person.

Until next time...

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Atari: Q3 07 Sees Losses Lessen

While somewhat beleaguered in the past few years, Atari might finally be turning a corner. While still not in the black, the publisher reported a significant decrease in its losses. This was helped due to reduced overhead and concentration on a smaller number of successful IPs. Atari may really start hitting its stride just in time for the next-gen.

Atari released the fiscal report for the third fiscal period of 2007. Revenue for the quarter ending December 31, 2006, was $47.3 million, a significant drop off compared to the $100.0 million in the comparable period a year earlier. However, the company's loss significantly decreased, from $4.8 million or $0.35 per share Q3 2006 to $0.7 million, or $0.05 per share this year.

"Once again, operating expenses were much lower than we expected primarily due to lower product development and general and administrative costs," said Michael Pachter of Wedbush Morgan. "It appears that the company's recent restructuring and February headcount reduction (it reduced its staff by 25%) is now being reflected."

The revenue over the nine month period in total was also reduced, down to $95.3 million from $162.2 million last year. Again, however, the losses were reduced significantly. So far, the company has only lost $7.5 million, or $0.56 per share, compared to net loss of $62.8 million, or $4.96 per share same period last year.

"Atari continues to focus on improving product quality and is committed to growing shareholder value," stated David Pierce, President and CEO of Atari. "Specifically, Never Winter Nights 2, Dragon Ball Z: Budokai Tenkaichi 2 and Test Drive Unlimited achieved our targets of quality and market place acceptance on a global basis."

Highlights for the remainder of the year include Dragon Ball Z: Shin Budokai 2 for PSP, Test Drive Unlimited on PC and PS2 and Bullet Witch for Xbox 360 (which also went Gold status).

"We continue to believe that Atari is attempting to save its way to prosperity," added Pachter. "Though we believe that it is important for the company to align its cost structure with its sharply reduced revenue profile, we believe that alignment only makes sense in the context of future growth. In order to achieve that growth, we believe that the company must invest in R&D, and we are concerned that lack of investment in R&D and marketing could limit Atari's ability to effectively compete as the next generation consoles begin to ramp."

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. First off, let me apologize for not having a column in last week, but there just weren't enough messages to put together a good column, and my intro was... well, let's just say it was a good example of what happens when someone bottles up frustration for a full week and then sits down to write something.

Anyway, this week's column should be of a 'normal' length, since I'm including messages from last week as well as this week's. And I've taken steps to vent some of my frustration, so I won't be telling you what a bunch of cabbage-heads our politicians are, or how evil corporate America can be, or how God must love stupid people because he made so damned many of them.

Oh. Uh.. ummm... was that out loud? I guess I hadn't vented as much as I thought I had. [grin]

Well, let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
==========

'James D' asks about having 2 hard drives in his Falcon:

"I know that an IDE channel by default can only have two devices connected to it but can the falcon have 2 ide drives internally with just a 2.5 ide cable with three connections?

Or as usual there is much more to it.

I know this is possible in the amiga but I have a spare 2.5 inch ide drive with a cable ready to connect???"

Dr. Uwe Seimet, author of HD Driver, tells James:

"What exactly does *three* connections mean? Fact is that you can connect two IDE/ATAPI drives to the Falcon, as long as you ensure that the cable is not too long. And, of course, one drive must be jumpered as master, the other as slave."

Roger Burrows tells James:

"As Uwe says, it's quite straightforward, just use a short cable and don't forget to configure one drive as master & one as slave. The main issue is probably finding space within a standard Falcon's case. Of course if you've recased it this would presumably not be an issue."

Ronald Hall adds:

"I've got 2 IDE devices on mine - one is an 80 gig Maxtor hard drive, and the other is a Lite-On DVD burner..."

James replies:

"Thanks all, I will try it when I next have the courage to rip open my Falcon again.

The only problem it seems was getting hold of a 2.5 Inch IDE lead that enabled 2 hard drives to be connected at once, hence why I said "3 connectors". Standard 2.5 inch Laptop IDE cables are plentiful but only for one device. I had to get the cable from an Amiga firm.....argh"

Bernd Mueller explains:

"I think he means that kind of cable: http://tinyurl.com/2aovfm "
[URL modified by Editor]

Mark Bedingfield adds:

"Modern 2.5 inch drives are quite slim compared to the 65 meg disks the Falcon came with. I would reckon it would not be too hard to modify the cradle to take 2 drives."

'Peter' asks about upgrading his 1040ST:

"Hello, I have a friend who has an Atari 1040ST and he wants to upgrade the memory to 4Mb. I found some one who has an Atari falcon 4 Mb upgrade, can anyone tell me if it would work? If not has anyone got a spare 4Mb chip?"

'Aly' tells Peter simply:

"www.logicsays.com/entry and click on Atari."

Matthias Arndt adds:

"Falcon memory upgrades do not fit into any 1040!
If it is an STE, you can use standard memory of its time and those are still available on Ebay.

If it is an STF or STFM you run out of luck. You will need soldering and some hacking of the MMU connections to fit an upgrade to 4MB. A single RAM chip of 4MB wouldn't help either, you would need to build an entire access logic to make the ST able to access it."

'PKPera' asks about video playback on an ST:

"I made some experiments with video-audio playback on Atari ST(e)

machines. It is possible to get smooth playback with 25 fps and full low res 320x200. : http://www.ppest.org/atari/movpst.php "

Guillaume Tello offers:

"I wrote MP_STE, still available for download on my web page (can play AVI, MOV, FLI, etc...) http://perso.orange.fr/gtello/downld_e.htm "

PK replies:

"Yes, I know about it. Your program is much more complex and certainly many files work in it.

But it is simply not for a machine like an ST or STe. I achieved 1.3 fps on a STE at 320x200, and in B/W, what is more slideshow than movie playback.

Just reading raw bitmaps at 25 fps occupies about 80-90% of machine’s capability. For playing back compressed videos at 320x240 for instance 100MHz CPU may be not fast enough- depending on the used codec.

Another thing is memory usage - my player uses not any buffering, so it can play practically any length on machine with 512KB, without any stoppings.

I just think about making DVD with some movie in LAV format. There should fit about 90 minutes of uncompressed video with audio. But it will require direct sector access instead slow file access to DVD."

Guillaume Tello replies:

"Yes, you’re right with the low speed with MP_STE when decoding AVI/MOV. But I also have the FLM format from Lexicor that I extended to add sound.

It is compressed but the decompression is very fast because the images are stored in the video format 320x200x4 planes and that the decompression is done directly in the video ram.

Your idea of a DVD in LAV format for STE is good. But I would like to try to make a FLM from one of your videos and see two things:

- does the compression give the opportunity to store more than 90 minutes onto your DVD

- does the uncompression allow the 25 fps?"

Phantomm tells Guillaume:

"MPLAYER supports VideoMaster FLM videos with sound.
But the last version I tried there was a bug on the sound.

There were 2 VideoMaster Carts, One just for the Falcon and one for the ST/STE/Falcon.

Not sure if this bug was fixed but here is some info that may help.

For VideoMaster Falcon videos with sound. The sample Rate is Fixed at 12.292kHz 16Bit Stereo. According to the VMF Manual.

The Earlier VideoMaster cartridge for the ST/STE/Falcon didn't have a fixed frequency! It started out at 1KHZ and went up to 16KHZ in steps of 1 KHZ.

I can't find anything in the manual about the samples being mono or Stereo. Or 16Bit or 8Bit.

I think they are 8Bit Stereo, but do not know for sure as I have no docs on this. Anyone know for sure?

Reason I mention this is that I remember getting static when playing a Video and Sound FLM file recorded from the VideoMaster Falcon Cart IIRC.

Maybe you can do a update to Mplayer to play all the VideoMaster Sound files correctly if you haven't done so already."

Well folks, that's it for this time around. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - id Confirms Enemy Territory: Quake Wars!
"""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""" 'Rogue Galaxy' Is A Blast
Manhunt 2 In Development!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Traveling Deep Into 'Rogue Galaxy' Is A Blast

They don't have eye patches or peg legs, but this band of pirates is every bit as adventurous.

Intergalactic swashbucklers raid the PlayStation 2 in Sony's Rogue Galaxy, a fast-paced action RPG with a rich storyline and impressive depth.

You play Jaster, a young adventurer who yearns to travel in space. Jaster’s quest starts when beasts invade home planet Rosa. With the help of a mysterious fighter, Jaster vanquishes his foes. After secretly watching Jaster in action, a pair of space pirates ask him aboard their ship and explore the galaxy. He readily accepts.

Right away, Rogue Galaxy displays richness and vibrancy. The storyline is thorough, yet rarely dull. Some cut scenes last too long, but quite a few of the action sequences are breathtaking.

Rogue Galaxy’s graphics are daring. Cut scenes and gameplay look nearly identical, creating seamless shifts between the two.

Sound elements mostly complement Rogue. The voice acting is cheesy on occasion.

But the game’s bold musical selection keeps the energy strong.

As you progress, you meet different fighters that accompany you, up to four at once. Each of the game’s worlds is teeming with life, allowing for plenty of interaction. Shops are scattered throughout to replenish your inventory of items.

Transporters serve as save points as well as - you guessed it - ways to quickly transport to different spots on the map. It’s a great wrinkle that keeps the pace fast.

Where the exploration suffers slightly is the lack of real problem-solving. There’s rarely a moment where you’re puzzled about what to do next. It’s pointed out for you. Interactions offer minor details on your environment, but little else.

Plenty of side games help break up the exploring. The Insectron tournament lets you find and breed killer bugs to enter into an arena-style showdown. A weapon synthesizer combines swords, guns and other tools to create more powerful arsenals.

As with all RPGs, experience points are crucial. As you boost your experience, more weapons become available to you. You’ll also collect items which, when put together, unlock a special combat power. The range in abilities is vast, including fiery swords and whipping desert winds. A Revelation Flow charts each item you find and how much further your powers can expand.

Rogue’s real-time battle system is fantastic, both in terms of action and the ease in which you can incorporate your abilities and teammates. Enemies are varied yet all vicious, from balls of slime to hulking gorillas.

Early on, Rogue gives the impression of a repetitive button-masher. But once additional team members and enhanced abilities enter the fray, the battles become exciting. Each character has a primary and secondary weapon. Jaster, for example, carries a sword and gun.

With a press of the triangle, you gain full control of your team. Send them to fight separately or converge on one target. Unleash their powers on enemies for lethal damage. Flip between characters to take advantage of their strengths.

Manhunt 2 In Development For Playstation 2, PSP, and Nintendo Wii

Rockstar Games, the world-renowned publishing label of Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc., is proud to announce Manhunt 2 for the PlayStation 2 system, PSP system, and Nintendo's Wii. Manhunt 2 is the debut title from the newly formed Rockstar London studio, which is developing the game in conjunction with series creator Rockstar North. The Wii version is being developed by Rockstar Toronto. Manhunt 2 will be available this summer.

"With Manhunt 2 we have tried to create a game that stays close to the original concept of chilling suspense and stealth, whilst pushing the game design and storytelling forward," said Sam Houser, founder and executive producer of Rockstar Games. "We are also excited to have our newest development team, Rockstar London, working on the title alongside our two established UK studios, Rockstar North and Leeds."

For more information on Manhunt 2 please visit http://www.rockstargames.com.

id Confirms Enemy Territory: Quake Wars for Next-Generation Consoles

The war between the GDF and Strogg will soon be igniting on next-generation consoles as id Software and Activision, Inc. today confirmed that Enemy Territory: Quake Wars, the team-based first person action title, and already one of the most anticipated new properties of 2007 is coming to next-gen platforms. In this epic multiplayer-focused game, players can choose to defend humanity as a part of the Global Defense Force (GDF) or destroy it as a merciless Strogg alien invader. Under the executive production of id Software, Nerve Software is developing Enemy Territory: Quake Wars for the Xbox 360 video game and entertainment system from Microsoft, while Z-Axis is the developer for the PlayStation 3 computer entertainment system.

"We're pleased to be working with Nerve and Z-Axis to bring the highly-anticipated gameplay from Enemy Territory: Quake Wars to the Xbox 360 and PlayStation 3 system," said Todd Hollenshead, CEO, id Software.

Winner of more than 15 awards in 2006 and already selected as one of the most anticipated new titles in 2007 by more than eight publications, Enemy Territory: Quake Wars is being developed for the Windows PC by Splash Damage - the Nerve Software and Z-Axis console versions will also feature strategic team play, persistent character promotions and online stats tracking. Players choose to battle as one of five unique classes in either the conventionally armed GDF army or the futuristic Strogg invasion force, each outfitted with specialist weapons and combat hardware. In this adrenaline pumping fight for survival, warring forces utilize a variety of different vehicles, deployable structures, and defense systems including quad-bikes, tanks, and alien walkers for epic ground assaults; or helicopters and anti-gravity ships to unleash airborne attacks. Throughout each battle, teams establish bases, deploy defense structures, artillery, radar, and advanced forward-command systems into enemy territory while constructing and demolishing obstacles to speed progress and gain a tactical advantage over the opponent. Enemy Territory: Quake Wars features 16-player battles on the console systems, delivering the ultimate team-and

objective-based multiplayer experience.

Enemy Territory: Quake Wars has not yet been rated by the ESRB.

Ghost Rider Ships For Playstation 2 and PSP

2K, a publishing label of Take-Two Interactive Software, Inc., Tuesday announced that Ghost Rider, the action-packed combat and motorcycle video game featuring Marvel Comics' iconic supernatural superhero, is now available in North America for the PlayStation 2 computer entertainment system, the PSP (PlayStation Portable) system and Game Boy Advance. The title will be available in Europe as the movie releases in different regions. The Ghost Rider video game reflects the stylized action of the successful Marvel comic series and Sony Pictures' upcoming Ghost Rider movie.

The game was developed by Climax and its storyline was authored by famed comic writers Garth Ennis and Jimmy Palmiotti. In the video game, stuntman Johnny Blaze is brought back as his alter ego, Ghost Rider, to protect others from experiencing his Hell on Earth. Ghost Rider haunts America's highways, inflicting his righteous wrath upon the souls of the wicked and the damned. The unique storyline takes Ghost Rider to a large variety of scenes and locations, while facing off against familiar faces from both the Marvel comic universe and Sony Pictures' movie.

"The Ghost Rider video game offers an exhilarating gameplay experience in a fast-paced environment. Ghost Rider can battle multiple enemies from the Marvel Universe using his trademark weapons, the Hellfire Chain and Hellfire Shotgun," said Christoph Hartmann, President of 2K. "Fans of the comic book series will love its true-to-form style."

Features:

* Ride the terrifying Hell Cycle, swinging Ghost Rider's chain at enemies and using the bike's powers to ride on water, boost over jumps, and power down under obstacles.
* Travel through several locations from the movie, including the Quentin Carnival and Caretaker's Graveyard and take a ride down the skyscraper that links Earth to the depths of Hell.
* Upgrade the Hell Cycle, gain new moves and increase Ghost Rider's stats using the essence of defeated foes as currency.
* Besides possessing superhuman strength, speed and durability, Ghost Rider can force criminals to experience a level of emotional pain equivalent to that which they have caused in others with his Penance Stare.
* Fight in spectacular boss battles with key Ghost Rider villains, including Lilith, which will put players' combat skills to the test.
* Unlock original Ghost Rider comics, artwork, "making of" footage and developer interviews.
* Extended replay value with bonus characters, challenging players to dig deep into the experience.
* PSP offers new gameplay including game sharing, and Wi-Fi multiplayer racing for up to four players.

Ghost Rider, rated "T" for Teen, is now available for $29.99 for the PlayStation 2 system and the PSP system and $19.99 for the Game Boy Advance. For more information, please visit: http://www.ghostridergame.com.

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Microsoft Settles Iowa Antitrust Case

Microsoft Corp. on Wednesday settled a class-action lawsuit filed on behalf of thousands of Iowans who bought the company’s programs between 1994 and 2006. Terms of the deal were not immediately disclosed.

The lawsuit sought more than $330 million from Microsoft for allegedly engaging in monopolistic and anticompetitive conduct that caused customers to pay more for software than they would have if there had been competition.

Microsoft denied the allegations, saying Iowa customers received quality products at fair prices.

On Wednesday, Polk County District Court Judge Scott Rosenberg ordered attorneys to refrain from disclosing details of the settlement until April.

"The court will be advised of the terms of the settlement in April and there will be a hearing on April 20 for preliminary approval and if all goes as scheduled there will be a hearing for final approval on Aug. 31," said Microsoft attorney Rich Wallis.

The world’s largest software maker has faced 206 class-action lawsuits across the United States since 2000. The company said 108 were consolidated in a federal antitrust case and 96 remained in state courts.

Most were dismissed or settled before trial.

Only two, the Iowa case and one in Minnesota, went to trial. The Minnesota case was settled after about two months into the trial.

Attorneys Roxanne Conlin and Rich Hagstrom filed the Iowa lawsuit in 2000. "It was a mutual decision to settle and you kind of have to see the cards lay down. That’s part of what happens for both sides," Conlin said. "You have to assess your risk and you have to assess what’s in the best interest of your clients."

Both sides agreed the settlement will include making money available to buy computers and software for Iowa schools.

"We’re going to take half of the unclaimed amount and use that to close the digital divide in Iowa," Conlin said.

Conlin would not say whether the settlement would take the form of cash or vouchers for computer equipment. Previously, she said she would refuse to

accept vouchers.

In the Minnesota case, the lawyers sought more than $300 million from the company. During trial, the case settled for $174.5 million. Lawyer fees were about $59.4 million, according to court documents. The six plaintiffs who brought the case forward received $5,000 each

FDA Warns Of Dangers Of Internet Drugs

Consumers who thought they were purchasing sleep aids, antidepressants and other drugs over the Internet instead were shipped a powerful anti-psychotic, sending some unwitting victims to the emergency room, federal health officials warned Friday.

The Food and Drug Administration said a number of consumers took the schizophrenia drug, haloperidol, after being shipped what they thought were a variety of different pills, including Ambien, a sleep aid, and the anti-anxiety medications Xanax and Ativan. Others thought they were getting the antidepressant Lexapro.

Preliminary analysis of the pills, packaged in plain plastic bags and mailed in envelopes bearing Greek postmarks, suggest they contain haloperidol. The FDA said it had reports of several consumers seeking emergency medical treatment for symptoms such as difficulty in breathing, muscle spasms and muscle stiffness after taking the pills.

The FDA used the occasion to remind consumers of the possible dangers of buying prescription drugs on the Web.

The FDA posted images of the suspect pills and their shipping packages on its Web site - http://www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/news/photos/haloperidol.html - to help consumers identify any suspect product they may have ordered.

Consumers apparently ordered the drugs through a variety of commercial Web sites. The FDA said it was investigating.

College: Wikipedia Not Source For Papers

Middlebury College history students are no longer allowed to use Wikipedia in preparing class papers.

The school’s history department recently adopted a policy that says it’s OK to consult the popular online encyclopedia, but that it can’t be cited as an authoritative source by students.

The policy says, in part, "Wikipedia is not an acceptable citation, even though it may lead one to a citable source."

History professor Neil Waters says Wikipedia is an ideal place to start research but an unacceptable way to end it.

Judge Dismisses $30 Million MySpace Lawsuit

A lawsuit against MySpace has been dismissed by a U.S. District Judge who declared the social-networking site protected under the Communications Decency Act. The $30 million suit was filed by the family of a 13-year-old girl who says she was sexually assaulted by a 19-year-old man she met through the site. The family accused MySpace of lacking proper controls for its underage users.

In the ruling, Judge Sam Sparks noted that the site cannot be expected to verify the age of every user, although it does set 14 as the minimum age for registration.

The act cited by the judge is designed to grant immunity to interactive online services for the content posted by their users. In his decision, Sparks wrote that companies like MySpace would be crippled by lawsuits arising out of third-party communications if they were made responsible for user actions.

In the ruling, Sparks also noted that the girl lied about her age, posing as an 18-year-old and ignoring the minimum age requirement stated by MySpace during user signup.

The attorney for the family, Adam Loewy of Austin-based Barry & Loewy, was quoted in news reports as saying that the family would appeal the decision. He also said the family plans to file charges of fraud and misrepresentation to go along with the current charges of negligence.

There are other, similar suits pending against MySpace, filed in state court in California, that allege the site was negligent in protecting teen users.

The suits were filed around the same time that MySpace announced the development of a free parental control tool that’s expected to be available this summer.

The tool, codenamed "Zephyr," will allow parents to check the basic information posted by their teens, including age, location, and username.

Other controls that have been recently implemented include a more sophisticated background check system, which compares user profiles with state and federal databases of sex offenders.

The site also hired about 100 employees last year to handle security issues, and created an ad campaign in conjunction with the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children to raise awareness among teenagers about the dangers of posting too much personal information online.

"There’s more that can be done in terms of protecting underage MySpace users, but the good news is that the site is listening," said Parry Aftab, executive director of watchdog group WiredSafety, which consults with MySpace and is currently helping to create more education initiatives for the site.

"The question of how to make a site like MySpace safer is difficult, because you have many different elements," Aftab added. "Not only do you have user education, but Congress needs to be involved, and law enforcement, and parents. This will be an ongoing issues for some time."

Many Dating Teens Get High-Tech Abuse

Jealous teenagers often use cell phones and computers to harass and control their romantic partners, and most victims of the abuse are reluctant to discuss it with their parents, a survey showed on Thursday.

The survey, carried out by Teenage Research Unlimited, found nearly 25 percent of teens in a relationship had received hourly text messages or phone calls to check up on them between midnight and 5 a.m. One out of six said they had received messages 10 or more times an hour overnight.

"According to our experts, contacting someone that frequently with those kinds of questions is simply about control and intimidation. It’s not a casual conversation," said Jane Randel, a vice president for clothing retailer Liz Claiborne Inc., which commissioned the survey.

The survey was released at the launch of the loveisrespect.org, The National Teen Dating Abuse Hotline, an Internet and telephone service to help teenagers involved in abusive relationships. It is sponsored by Liz Claiborne and the National Domestic Violence Hotline.

More than a third of the teens questioned for the survey said a boyfriend or girlfriend had harassed them with text messages, and a quarter said their partner had used a cell phone, e-mail, blog or Web chat to insult them.

One in five said their boyfriends or girlfriends had used cell phones, e-mail or Instant Messaging to press them for sex, and one in 10 said they had been threatened with violence, the study found.

Victims of abusive behavior were reluctant to tell their parents. Seventy-two percent said they had not told them about receiving a harassing number of e-mails or text messages, and 82 percent had not told them about being pressed to engage in sexual activity, the survey said.

Asked about why they had not told their parents about the abusive behavior, nearly half said the problem was not serious, and more than a quarter said they feared losing access to the technology, either cell phone or computer, the survey said.

The online survey, carried out from December 15 to 22, questioned 615 youngsters age 13 to 18 and 414 parents of teens in that age range.

It had a margin of error of 4 percentage points for the teenagers and 5 percentage points for the adults. The margin of error for teens in a relationship was 5 percentage points, and 7 percentage points for the parents of teens in a relationship.

Teen Tech Tormentors: What’s A Parent To Do?

When Boston University sophomore Kendrick Sledge was 14, incessant phone calls alerted her parents to her relationship with an abusive and controlling older boy, who would threaten suicide or a return to using drugs if she tried to break up with him.

There were also offers of gifts. Only the fear of getting in trouble with her parents prompted Sledge to turn down his offer to buy her a mobile phone.

"Thank goodness I didn't take it. It would have just become a private line for him to torture me," said Sledge, now 19.

Today's uber-wired teens aren't so lucky, according to a recent survey of 13- to 18-year-olds conducted for apparel company Liz Claiborne Inc. One in three said they get as many as 30 hourly mobile phone text messages from a boyfriend or girlfriend wanting to know where they are, what they're doing or who they're with.

Nearly one in four reported hourly contact with a partner via cell phone or text messages between midnight and 5 a.m.

Computers also are used as tools to control, harass or humiliate, the teen respondents said.

Just over 70 percent said rumor spreading by boyfriends or girlfriends on mobile phones or online social networking sites - such as News Corp.'s popular MySpace.com - is a serious problem. Nearly the same percentage of teens said sharing private or embarrassing pictures/ or videos via cell phone or computers represented serious trouble.

Where Sledge's parents couldn't help but notice their home phone ringing off the hook - nearly 70 percent of today's teens surveyed said their parents have no clue that the high-tech gadgets they provided in an effort to keep their offspring safe were being used by peers for psychological or physical warfare.

That's something Sledge and others are working to change.

Sledge is a member of a teen task force set up by Liz Claiborne, which partnered with the National Domestic Violence Hotline to create www.loveisrespect.org, a national teen dating abuse helpline launched earlier this month.

The importance of such efforts was underscored this week after a federal judge in Texas dismissed a high-profile lawsuit brought against MySpace by the family of a teenage girl who was sexually assaulted by a 19-year-old man she met on popular social networking site.

One New York City mother got a chilling first-hand view of the problem after her teenage daughter's friends posted a picture of her in a bathing suit on MySpace.com.

Her daughter found it funny and tried to brush off her mom's concerns, begging her not to call the other parents, even after the post attracted responses that appeared to come from adult men.

The concerned mom, who asked not to be identified, said she pulled down the MySpace posting, only to find that her daughter opened a new MySpace account two months later that included enough personal information for anyone to physically locate her.

"Perfectly good parents who have a lot of communication with their kids are having problems with this. It's very scary. Teenagers cannot assess risk.

Getting into serious trouble happens to other people and not to them," she warned.

A variety of surveys have shown that most kids have suffered random acts of cruelty at the hands of so-called friends.

Teens, who tend to favor IM and texting over e-mail, are vulnerable because they don't have the experience to know the difference between healthy behavior and harassment. When something goes wrong, they often feel isolated and are reluctant to turn to parents or other adults for fear of losing mobile phone or computer rights - or being banned from seeing certain people.

"It's open season on kids," said Brandon Watson, chief executive of privately held IMSafer, a company that monitors conversations on AOL, Yahoo, MSN and MySpace IM programs and flags dangerous, inappropriate or threatening words, IM jargon or themes and alerts parents who subscribe when it detects a potential threat. It also offers a forum for parents at IMSafer.com.

Lori Hahn, a computer savvy mother of three teens who keeps up with IM acronyms, said she signed on with the company after stumbling upon a chat session in which her 13-year-old son was talking with an adult male, whose picture came up in the IM window.

"We had a conversation about it. He hadn't been aware that talking to strangers on the Internet wasn't a fine thing to do ... He was just naive," she said, noting that IMSafer sends her flagged exchanges with a few other lines of text to put the conversation in context.

"I'm not going to leave it to chance. I don't think I hover, but I try to keep them safe. They're the only kids I have," Hahn said.

Since no technology offers a bullet-proof solution, technology and anti-violence experts say parents have to get involved.

Sledge suggests that parents who suspect technology-enabled abuse stay open to having a conversation about what may be happening, rather than running with the instinctive response of forbidding their child from seeing or communicating with his or her abuser.

"Sit down with your child and say, 'I'm concerned, you seem to be acting different. Is something wrong?'," said Sledge, who noted that parents can also use the new teen helpline.

Teacher Convicted In Porn Case

Until recently, Julie Amero says, she lived the quiet life of a small-town substitute teacher, with little knowledge of computers and even less about porn.

Now she is in the middle of a criminal case that hinges on the intricacies of both, and it could put her behind bars for up to 40 years.

She was convicted last month of exposing seventh-grade students to pornography on her classroom computer. She contended the images were inadvertently thrust onto the screen by pornographers' unseen spyware and

adware programs.

Prosecutors dispute that. But her argument has made her a cause celebre among some technology experts, who say what happened to her could happen to anyone.

"I’m scared," the 40-year-old Amero said. "I’m just beside myself over something I didn’t do."

It all began in October 2004. Amero was assigned to a class at Kelly Middle School in Norwich, a city of around 37,000 people about 40 miles east of Hartford.

Amero says that before her class started, a teacher allowed her to e-mail her husband. She says she used the computer and went to the bathroom, returning to find the permanent teacher gone and two students viewing a Web site on hair styles.

Amero says she chased the students away and started class. But later, she says, pornographic images started popping up on the computer screen by themselves. She says she tried to click the images off, but they kept returning, and she was under strict orders not to shut the computer off.

"I did everything I possibly could to keep them from seeing anything," she says.

Prosecutor David Smith contended at Amero’s three-day trial that she actually clicked on graphic Web sites.

Several students testified that they saw pictures of naked men and women, including at least one image a couple having oral sex.

Computer consultant Herb Horner testified for the defense that the children had gone to an innocent Web site on hair styles and were redirected to another hairstyle site that had pornographic links. "It can happen to anybody," Horner said.

The defense argued that the images were caused by adware and spyware, programs that are often secretly planted on computers by Internet businesses to track users’ browsing habits. They can generate pop-up ads, in some cases, pornographic ones.

"It’s absolutely plausible," Ari Schwartz, deputy director of the Center for Democracy and Technology, said of Amero’s case. "It’s a huge problem."

But many remain skeptical, including Mark Steinmetz, who served on Amero’s jury.

"So many kids noticed this going on," Steinmetz said. "It was truly uncalled for. I would not want my child in her classroom. All she had to do was throw a coat over it or unplug it. We figured even if there were pop-ups, would you sit there?"

The Federal Trade Commission has been cracking down on companies accused of spreading malicious spyware to millions of computer users worldwide.

Amero and her supporters say the old computer lacked firewall or antispyware protections to prevent inappropriate pop-ups.

"What is extraordinary is the prosecution admitted there was no search made

for spyware, an incredible blunder akin to not checking for fingerprints at a crime scene," Alex Eckelberry, president of a Florida software company, wrote recently in the local newspaper. "When a pop-up occurs on a computer, it will get shown as a visited Web site, and no 'physical click' is necessary."

Smith, the prosecutor, would not say what he plans to recommend when Amero is sentenced March 2. John Newsone, a defense attorney in Norwich familiar with the case, said Amero might be spared prison or face perhaps a year to 18 months.

Principal Scott Fain said the computer lacked the latest firewall protection because a vendor's bill had gone unpaid. "I was shocked to see what made it through," he said.

But Fain also said Amero was the only one to report such a problem: "We've never had a problem with pop-ups before or since."

US Group Launches Resource To Protect Children On Internet

A children's advocacy group launched the first-of-its-kind free online safety resource to help parents and educators protect youths from being exploited on the Internet.

NetSmartz411, as the online program is called, is managed by experts at the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) who can answer frequently asked questions about Internet safety and online security.

"Parents and guardians have a very tough job keeping up with their children in this ever changing world of technology," said Ernie Allen, NCMEC president and chief executive officer. He said the resource located at www.NetSmartz411.org was made possible by a 500,000-dollar grant from the Qwest Foundation, which works to promote online safety awareness.

People who use the new site can inquire on a variety of topics including how to report Internet crime, how to be on the lookout for online sexual predators or what is a chat room and how it works.

Parents can also get a grasp of the lingo used by youngsters on the Internet. For example, 143 stands for I love you, PAL: parents are listening, or POS: parent over shoulder.

According to a recent NCMEC-commissioned study by the University of New Hampshire, one in seven youths online is sexually solicited, and one in three youths will encounter unwanted exposure to sexually explicit material online.

'One Laptop Per Child' Rolls Out in February

From Brazil to Pakistan, some of the world's poorest children will peer across the digital divide this month - reading electronic books, shooting digital video, creating music and chatting with classmates online.

Founded by Massachusetts Institute of Technology academics, the non-profit "One Laptop per Child" project will roll out nearly 2,500 of its $150-laptops to eight nations in February.

The experiment is a prelude to mass production of the kid-friendly, lime-green-and-white laptops scheduled to begin in July, when five million will be built.

Its technological triumphs include a hand crank to charge its battery, a keyboard that switches between languages, a digital video camera, wireless connectivity and Linux open-source operating software tailored for remote regions.

The project’s operators say the price should fall to $100 apiece next year, when they hope to produce 50 million of the so-called "XO" machines, before dipping below $100 by 2010 when they aim to reach 150 million of the world’s poorest children.

"We’re pledging to always drive the price down," Walter Bender, the group’s president of software and content, told Reuters. "Rather than continuing to add features to keep the price inflated, we’re keeping the feature set stable and driving the price down."

A string pully, which Bender likens to a "salad spinner", is replacing the handcrank. A minute of pulling generates 10 minutes of electricity. The display switches from color to black and white for viewing in direct sunlight, a feature unavailable in laptops 10 times more expensive.

State educators in Brazil, Uruguay, Libya, Rwanda, Pakistan, Thailand and possibly Ethiopia and the West Bank will receive the first of the machines in February’s pilot before a wider rollout to Indonesia and a handful of other countries.

But not everyone is applauding. Some predict the project will be a financial burden on countries that can least afford it with no guarantee of success. Others say the money would be better spent on food, medicine, libraries and schools.

Some African officials question whether it suits the education of children outside the United States. Still others question whether the laptops simply will end up resold in illegal markets by cash-strapped families and communities.

"On the technology I think the project is amazing and wonderful," said Wayan Vota, whose blog (http://olpcnews.com/) monitors the project. "What gives me pause is the social implications, the economic implications" of how they plan to implement it.

"Essentially they want developing countries, or countries that already have a significant amount of debt or other commitments, to borrow even more, or to use even more of their limited resources, to buy the laptops and to implement them in a way that is untried and untested on a large scale."

Vota, who is also director of Geekcorps, a nonprofit that promotes communication technology in developing countries, predicts staggering costs for some poor nations.

"If you look at the cost of doing one laptop per every Nigerian child it actually turns out to be 73 percent of the entire Nigerian budget, that’s

not the educational part but the entire national budget of Nigeria," he said.

Some educators may also be hostile toward it because the machines are designed to encourage students to experiment with everything from music and creating videos to writing their own computer programs, said Ethan Zuckerman, a fellow at Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet and Society.

"You'll find some classrooms where the teachers are excited about letting the students experiment and explore but you'll also find a lot based on rote and repetition," he said.

But Vota and Zuckerman praised One Laptop Per Child for its pioneering innovations including a laptop that needs just two watts of power compared to the typical laptop's 30 to 40 watts, and does away with hard drives, relying instead on flash memory and four USB ports to add memory devices.

Groups of the laptops can communicate with each other even without an Internet connection under a pioneering "mesh" network so children can swap images and collaborate on projects. It boasts a music sequencer with digital instruments so children can play and create music.

Bender says the laptops can be remotely shut down to prevent them being sold in black markets.

But Vota contends that hackers will try to buy them and will easily crack their code. "For people earning one dollar a day the temptation to sell it for $300 will be very strong," he said.

Google E-mail Service Ready For All

Google Inc.'s free e-mail service will shed the final remnants of its invitation-only restrictions Wednesday, extending the reach of an increasingly popular product that has emerged as a vital cog in the online search leader's expansion efforts.

Invitations will no longer be required to join the nearly 3-year-old "Gmail" service in the United States, Canada, Mexico and a swath of Asian and South American countries where the Mountain View-based company previously limited the number of users.

With those restrictions now lifted, Gmail will be open to all comers worldwide for the first time since Google unveiled the service on April Fool's Day in 2004.

"It's a pretty momentous time for Gmail," said Keith Coleman, Google's product manager for the service.

Although it will no longer require invitations to sign up, Gmail is retaining its "beta," or test, status, signaling that Google still considers the service to be a work in progress.

Making Gmail more widely available is important to Google because other key products like instant messaging and calendar management are tied into the e-mail service, company co-founder Sergey Brin said an interview. "It has become a real cornerstone for us."

Because Gmail users often remain logged into Google's Web site while they conduct online searches, the service also helps the company's engineers learn more about individual preferences, knowledge that can help deliver more relevant search results and foster more loyalty.

The decision to lift all invitation requirements on Gmail signals Google finally believes it has adequate computing capacity to accommodate the generous amount of free storage provided by the e-mail service after investing heavily in additional data centers. Gmail offers each account at least 2.8 gigabytes of storage, enough to fill about 1.4 million pages.

In 2006 alone, Google's capital expenditures totaled $1.9 billion, with much of the money going toward additional computing capacity. It's an investment that Google could easily afford, having earned $3.1 billion on revenue of $10.6 billion last year.

Now that Google has more computing muscle, Brin said the company will start selling additional storage capacity to e-mail users with extraordinary needs. Google still hasn't figured out the specifics, but Brin indicated the e-mail storage and fees to be introduced later this year would be similar to Google's photo-hosting service that charges $25 annually for 6.25 gigabytes and $500 annually for 250 gigabytes.

"We can't afford to give away everything for free," Brin said.

Google tries to make money off its e-mail service by electronically scanning the content of the communications so it can display advertising links tied to the topics being discussed.

Gmail's advertising methods have raised some privacy concerns and turned off some potential users who don't like the idea of their e-mail discussions being perused or commercialized.

Nevertheless, Gmail has been growing rapidly as Google gradually opened the service in other parts of the world and made it increasingly easy to wrangle an invitation where the restrictions were still in effect.

Like the other major providers of free e-mail, Google won't specify how many users it has. But statistics compiled by the research firm comScore Inc. indicate Google has surpassed AOL to become the world's third largest e-mail service behind longtime leaders Yahoo Inc. and Microsoft Corp.

In December, Gmail attracted 60 million unique visitors, a 71 percent increase from the prior year, according to comScore Networks Inc.'s World Metrix.

Despite that progress, Gmail remains far behind Yahoo Inc.'s free e-mail, which increased 11 percent to 249 million unique visitors and Microsoft's Windows Live Hotmail, which rose 13 percent to 236 million, comScore said.

Representatives for Yahoo and Microsoft, which don't require invitations, declined to comment specifically on the broader access to Gmail.

Google seems unlikely to catch Yahoo's and Microsoft's competing e-mail services any time soon, particularly since so many people are reluctant to change their existing addresses. But Gmail still "should gain some serious traction this year," predicted Jack Flanagan, a comScore analyst who follows the e-mail market.

Brin said he doesn't especially care if Gmail ever becomes the largest

e-mail service. "The trick isn’t getting more people to use the service. The trick is to get more people to use the service more effectively."

Even though Gmail hasn’t been universally available, its existence already has affected just about anyone with a free e-mail account by pressuring the market leaders to dramatically increase the storage capacity of individual mailboxes.

Sunnyvale-based Yahoo now provides 1 gigabyte of free e-mail storage while Redmond, Wash.-based Microsoft offers 2 gigabytes per e-mail account. "We will continue to listen to Yahoo users worldwide to evaluate our storage offering and to make sure our users always have as much as they need," Yahoo spokeswoman Karen Mahon said.

Both Yahoo and Microsoft were giving away less than 10 megabytes of e-mail storage when Gmail launched.

"We have already made e-mail better for everyone in the world," Google’s Coleman boasted.

Since Gmail’s arrival, both Yahoo and Microsoft have introduced upgraded versions of their free e-mail services that also remain in the beta phase. In another move that mimicked Gmail, Yahoo this week introduced a feature that allows instant messaging chats to be conducted within its e-mail service.

Security Experts Warn of Drive-By Pharming Attacks

Symantec’s Security Response division and the Indiana University School of Informatics are warning of a new hacker tactic called drive-by pharming. In this sinister plot twist on other drive-by hack techniques, attackers use a malicious Web site to remotely reconfigure home broadband routers.

With traditional pharming, an attacker redirects a user from a legitimate Web site to a bogus Web site that contains malicious code. Pharming attacks can be executed by either changing the host file on a victim’s PC or manipulating a domain name system (DNS) server.

Drive-by pharming takes this strategy one step further, and, according to Indiana University, up to 50 percent of home broadband users are susceptible to such attacks.

In the new scheme, when a user visits a malicious Web site, an attacker is able to remotely change the DNS settings on the broadband router or wireless access point and reroute requests for legitimate sites - like online banking sites or financial institutions - to bogus sites designed to steal login information.

"This new research exposes a problem affecting millions of broadband users worldwide," Oliver Friedrichs, director of Symantec Security Response, said in a statement. "Because of the ease by which drive-by pharming attacks can be launched, it is vital that consumers adequately protect their broadband routers and wireless access points today."

According to the study, attackers can only leverage drive-by pharming when a broadband router is not password-protected or an attacker is able to guess the password. Most routers come with well-known default passwords

that users don’t bother to change.

Professor Markus Jakobsson of the Indiana University School of Informatics said this new strategy shows how important the human factor is in security. "If an attacker can trick you into visiting his page, he can probe your machine," he explained. "Deceit is not new to humankind, but it is fairly recently that security researchers started taking it seriously."

Here’s how the drive-by pharming attack works: Once the user clicks on a malicious link, JavaScript code is used to change the DNS settings on the user’s router. From that point on, every time the user browses to a Web site, DNS resolution will be performed by the attacker’s server.

This gives the attacker complete discretion over which Web sites the victim visits on the Internet. For example, the users might think they are visiting their online banking Web site but in reality they have been redirected to the attacker’s site. These fraudulent sites are almost exact replicas of the actual site, so the user will likely not recognize the difference.

Once the user is directed to the pharmer’s "bank" site, and enters a username and password, the attacker can steal this information. The attacker will then be able to access the victim’s account on the real bank site and transfer funds, create new accounts, write checks, and so forth.

What’s important to remember is that this drive-by pharming scheme is an attack, not a vulnerability, said Michael Sutton, a security evangelist with SPI Dynamics. It relies on social engineering and lack of proper security controls, he explained, but does not take advantage of a security vulnerability.

"JavaScript is a powerful client-side scripting language and if a user can be social engineered into visiting a Web page, JavaScript can be leveraged to conduct a number of attacks," Sutton warned. "This is just of them." He said that other researchers have demonstrated several other kinds of attacks with JavaScript, with the results being scanning internal networks or accessing a user’s browsing history.

Because, as Sutton noted, the issue is not a vulnerability, existing security solutions on the market today cannot protect against this type of attack.

Drive-by pharming targets the user’s router directly, and the existing solutions only protect the user’s computer system.

Symantec said its Consumer Business Unit is working on technologies to help address the problem. The company’s goal is to automatically impede the attack by using several techniques running on the PC. Until then, Symantec is suggesting that computer users make sure their routers have unique passwords.

Symantec also recommends installing Internet security software and warns against clicking on links that seem suspicious, such as those sent in an e-mail from unfamiliar addresses.

Is That Really What Your E-mail Meant To Say?

Billions of emails are sent around the globe each day but are their true meanings getting across? Maybe not.

Although emails are quick and easy to send, their lack of facial cues, body language and emotional feedback mean they can be easily misinterpreted.

Kristin Byron, of the Whitman School of Management at Syracuse University in New York, believes that many email users could be sending and getting mixed messages in emails.

"A first step toward improving accuracy in emails is to recognize the possibility that we are fallible as both email senders and receivers," said Byron who is an assistant professor of management at the university.

"People make the assumption that emails are very clear but that is just not the case. There are a lot of misunderstandings," she added in an interview.

One of the main points of confusion is that people forget that emotions can be communicated in email. While facial expressions can be easy to read, there aren't the same clear signals in emails.

Misinterpreted emails could be a particular minefield in the workplace with co-workers perceiving emotional content in the email that may not be intended.

Emotions can be expressed in emails through punctuation marks and other techniques but that can confuse the message even more, according to Byron who will report her findings in the journal Academy of Management Review.

"The use of exclamation points, asterisks, or capital letters, the length of the message, even the use of emoticons all can be used or perceived to communicate emotion. Yet these are ambiguous in email communication - and are often discouraged from use in the workplace - and therefore may be misinterpreted," she said.

Emoticons are symbols such as smiling faces or characters on keyboards used in emails to show emotion.

To improve email communication and lower the risk of sending the wrong signals Byron suggests email users express themselves clearly and repeat important information they want to convey.

Companies might also consider offering training in the use of emails at work. "With the increasing reliance on emails in the workplace, understanding how to effectively communicate emotions by email is crucial," Byron added.

Vietnam PM Goes Online In First For One-party Rule

Vietnam's Prime Minister on Friday used his first online chat with the public to explain the ruling Communist Party's ban on private media, discuss his landmark visit to the Vatican and Hanoi's anti-corruption campaign.

The online chat by Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung was part of an effort by

the country’s leaders to appear more accountable to Vietnam’s 84 million people, of whom more than half are younger than 35 and more exposed to the world than previous generations.

Asked why he had signed a directive last year to ban any privatization of the media and whether it was against "the freedom and liberalizing democracy, which you strive for" Dung said the order was "in line with the aspirations of our people."

He said the more than 600 state-run newspapers "must become the mouthpiece, the forum for democracy of the people."

The party embraced market reforms of the mostly state-run economy that led to the country being admitted to the World Trade Organization in January, but they stop short at the media.

The party said in October that leaders would have regular online chats with the public on corruption and other controversial issues, a first for Vietnam.

Hanoi imposes legal and technical controls to block access to writings and people on the Internet who challenge one-party rule.

About 3.1 million Vietnamese are Communist Party members, according to the party, and about 16 percent of Vietnamese have access to the Internet.

Wearing a dark suit, white shirt and red tie, Dung sat in a black leather chair in front of four computer screens inside the office of the government Web site (www.chinhphu.vn) to answer questions submitted by the public.

About 20,000 questions were sent before the three-hour chat and Dung answered them verbally while government staff typed.

Top diplomat Vu Khoan conducted the initial online chat last December to discuss challenges facing Vietnam in the WTO and its hosting of the November summit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum.

In the space of 12 years, Vietnam has emerged from isolation to one of the world’s fastest-expanding economies with GDP growth of 8.17 percent in 2006 and is a beacon for foreign investment.

Dung said on Friday that Vietnam aimed to "equitise" all of its state-owned enterprises, using the term applied by Hanoi that refers to partial privatization of state-owned companies.

Dung, who was installed last June and is Vietnam’s youngest-ever premier, in January became the country’s first prime minister to attend the elite World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland and the highest-ranking official to meet the Pope.

Dung said online that the Vatican has proposed to establish diplomatic relations and he "has taken note and assigned the diplomatic agencies to conduct discussion."

Asked whether there were any obstacles or "banned zone" in the fight against endemic corruption, Dung replied, "So far, I have not seen anything obstructing me."

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